

Replic



Origin



This painting is a replica of an untitled work by Keith Haring in 1982, commonly described as the “winged merman.” The original was made with vinyl paint on vinyl tarpaulin, and was 72 x 72” (though in all the images of it I have found, the actual painted area is more rectangular in shape). This was made in a time where naturalistic art was steadily being overshadowed by abstracted work, so Haring’s style gained a lot of attention and appreciation. He was traditionally an artist who painted on subway walls or similarly public areas, and from this I infer that even in more at-home settings he was uninterested in using traditional supports like paper or canvas, which is why he preferred to paint on tarps.

My reproduction of this art piece is made with similarly-colored acrylic paint on oilcloth and is about 53 x 50” in size. To make the edges less rough like they are on the original tarp, I folded and taped them back (later I might sew or glue those edges down for more permanence, but for now packing tape is working just fine). To copy the painting, I used the gridding method by using strings taped around the edges of the painting for most of the work, and later I free-handed the rest based off the relative positions of the other lines in the artwork.

I also kept in mind some things while I painted so that I could have the best reproduction. Firstly, Haring was very focused on line. Many lines around the main figure are symbolic of spiritual energy of some kind, but even more depicted movement. There were some lines around the tail that suggested it was wiggling, and quite a few of the tiny lines in the ocean were tilted to go along with the waves. Also, the color was intentionally flat, so I needed to wait for the paint to completely dry before continuing so that I didn’t accidentally mix it. The proportion was also important, so that the dolphin was small enough to not detract from the main figure, but also had enough emphasis that the eye didn’t skip it.

While working, I encountered a few major problems:

*The original isn’t perfectly square like the measurements had suggested.* – To solve this, I had to take new measurements of my print-out and then calculate the new dimensions so that I could fold the oilcloth into better dimensions.

*I ripped a hole in the middle of the painting not long after the red had finished drying.* – This was incredibly alarming at the time, but turned out to be a simple fix. I took a square of new oilcloth and taped it to the back of the original, and then painted with copious amounts of red until the hole was nearly invisible. Later on, that area was where a large portion of the tail was, so the black paint helped to even more neatly disguise my accident.

*After finishing about half of the painting, I suddenly discovered that my calculations were completely off and that I had a lot less room left to paint than expected.* – This was very troubling, since I was too far in with too little time left to start from scratch. I ended up doing away with gridding like I had started with, and instead free-handed the rest so that it squished in to fit the space I had left but wouldn't look too awkward. In the end I actually think the free-handed section looks far better than the gridded part (i.e. the right side of the merman versus the left side). The bottom, however, couldn't be nicely fit into the space I had left unless I was about to abandon the consistent line size that is key to Haring's style. Since that was unacceptable, I instead made up how the rest of the ocean looked (keeping in mind that the original pattern depicting the ocean had clustered lines and that the black was painted on top of the green) and picked the longer wave that gave the piece the best balance.

I also encountered a variety of smaller problems (the oilcloth was plaid and I had to put more paint on it cover the pattern that still shown through after the first layer, the mer-tail was lopsided after I started to free-hand and I needed to paint it completely differently so it looked less weird, the string grid made lines in the paint, etc.), but nothing that really had to alter the way I worked on the painting like the three above.

If I were to do this painting again, I would change my process. First of all, I would triple-check all my measurements so that I wouldn't be thrown for a huge loop again. I would also use gridding to draw the figure first (in pencil so I could erase wrong marks right away rather than wait until the paint dried and repainted), and then remove the grid when I started to actually paint so I could have the smoothest lines and spend much less time in the long run.

On the whole, I would have to say that while I'm not *entirely* content with how this painting turned out, I did well at understanding Keith Haring's style and the subject of the original painting, particularly when considering that I had nearly no experience in painting to begin with. If I had more time I can guarantee the second reproduction would be down pat thanks to the experience I gained from the first. In fact I believe I'd like to reproduce another art piece for fun sometime, although likely on a less enormous scale than this one.